

Jacques LE MOYNE DES MORGUES (Dieppe c.1533 - London 1588)

A Globe Artichoke (Cynara scolymus)

Watercolour and gouache on paper prepared as vellum, with framing lines in brown ink and watercolour.

140 x 101 mm. (5 1/2 x 4 in.) [image]

195 x 147 mm. (7 5/8 x 5 3/4 in.) [sheet]

Previously known for the ethnographic drawings he produced during his travels, Jacques Le Moyne was only recognized as an important botanical artist in the early 20th century. In 1922 Spencer Savage, the librarian of the Linnean Society, identified Le Moyne as the artist responsible for a small album containing fifty-nine watercolours of flowers, fruit and butterflies in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Le Moyne seems to have produced a number of such albums of botanical watercolour drawings. As well as the album in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a volume of fifty studies of flowers and fruit, dated 1585, appeared at auction in 1961 and is today in the British Museum, while a further example, containing sixty drawings in watercolour and gouache, is in the Rachel Mellon collection at the Oak Spring Garden Library in Upperville, Virginia. The present sheet comes from the largest and most recently discovered compendium of botanical drawings by Le Moyne; the so-called 'Du Marry' album, which appeared at auction in New York in 2005 and was subsequently broken up.

Perhaps the earliest, and certainly the most substantial, album of botanical studies by Le Moyne to have come to light, the 'Du Marry' album contains eighty drawings in watercolour and gouache, together with an elaborate frontispiece in the form of an architectural cartouche, below which is written, in a 16th century hand, 'Cela est donné par Du Marry', signed with the initial H(?) below. The drawings from this album may date to the mid to late 1560s, when Le Moyne was still working in France, and as such are probably earlier in date than those found in the albums in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British

Museum. While several of the plants depicted in the 'Du Marry' album also appear in the other known albums, Le Moyne was careful to make each watercolour composition different from others of the same species. Characterized by elegant compositions enclosed in fictive frames, the watercolours in the 'Du Marry' album are drawn on paper smoothed with a stone to achieve a vellum-like surface. The paper is almost identical to that found in the Victoria and Albert florilegium, which is closest to the 'Du Marry' album in conception, appearance and date.

Le Moyne's 'Du Marry' album is one of the earliest French florilegia known. A compendium of images of flowering plants, studied directly from nature, a florilegium was related to the herbal; an early form of plant book providing exacting descriptions of plants for medicinal purposes. The rise of exploration in the 16th century brought many new plants to Europe, and stimulated a concurrent interest in garden design. There was also much demand, among collectors and scholars of exotic plants, for artists to record their transient beauty. Le Moyne was among the leading 16th century artists who specialized in the production of elaborately painted florilegia, and his splendid work in this field found a particularly receptive audience in Elizabethan England.

As the scholar Paul Hulton has noted of Le Moyne's watercolours in the British Museum album, in terms equally applicable to the present sheet, 'The drawings are nearly all of plants then commonly found in French or English gardens…They show an exquisite attention to detail, yet are drawn with a deep understanding and love of the subject which avoids all traces of superficial prettiness. They are plant portraits which delight the eye and at the same time satisfy to a remarkable extent the scientific requirements of the botanist. The combination of these virtues is very rarely found to the same degree at this period.'

A domesticated variety of the wild cardoon (Cynara cardunculus), the artichoke began to be cultivated in southern France and Italy in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. The plant was introduced into England in the first quarter of the 16th century, and by 1530 artichokes were being grown at King Henry VIII's garden at New Hall in Essex.

A similar study of a globe artichoke is part of the album of watercolours by Le Moyne in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. An artichoke is also found among the woodcuts of the Le clef des champs, pour trouver plusieurs animaux, tant bestes qu'oyseaux, avec plusieurs fleurs et fruitz, published by the artist in London in 1586.

Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, as one modern scholar has written, may be regarded as 'one of the earliest and most gifted botanical painters…His surviving watercolours and miniatures…show a surprising naturalism and a highly refined sense of colour and form.'

Literature:

Monique Kornell and Dániel Margóscy, ''A Spring of Immortal Colours'. Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (c.1533-1588) and Picturing Plants in the Sixteenth Century', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 2023, p.122, note 43.

Artist description:

The extraordinary life, career and work of the 16th century Huguenot artist Jacques Le Moyne has only relatively recently been studied. He seems to have been born in Dieppe around 1533, and it is supposed that he received his training as an artist there, but little else is known of the first thirty years of his life and career. He may have worked at the court of King Charles IX, and is first recorded as an official artist and cartographer attached, at the King's behest, to the 1564-1565 Huguenot expedition to northern Florida. The expedition, led by René Goulaine de Laudonnière, was intended to relieve a small Huguenot colony founded earlier by Jean Ribaut and hopefully establish a new French Protestant settlement there. Le Moyne's task was to map the Florida coastline and riverways, and to make drawings of the natives, their villages, and anything else worthy of observation.

Beset by a lack of provisions and reliant on the sometimes-hostile native Indians for food, as well as a mutiny among some of the troops accompanying them, many members of the expedition died of starvation or disease. Although much of the remaining French garrison was attacked and killed by Spanish forces in the autumn of 1565, Le Moyne and a few dozen Frenchmen, including Laudonnière, managed to escape the massacre. They travelled overland for three days, through swamps and rivers with little or no food, before reaching the coast and one of Ribaut's ships. The fifteen survivors of the expedition sailed back to Europe, unexpectedly landing in Wales in 1565. On his return to France, Le Moyne presented his maps and drawings of the Florida natives to Charles IX, who had supported Laudonnière's expedition. (Only one original drawing by Le Moyne from the Florida expedition survives today, however; a drawing in watercolour and gouache on vellum of The Indian Chief Athore Showing Laudonnière the Marker Column Set Up by Ribaut, now in the collection of the New York Public Library.) Le Moyne wrote an account of the ill-fated Florida expedition, illustrated with engravings after his drawings and maps, which was only published in 1591, after his death, with the title Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americae provincia Gallis acciderunt.

Like many of his Huguenot compatriots, Le Moyne escaped from France after the 1572 Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of Huguenots by Catholics. He settled in England, adding 'de Morgues' to his name, and soon gained the patronage of such significant figures of the era as Sir Walter Raleigh and Lady Mary Sidney, which allowed him to concentrate in particular on small-scale botanical studies. (He was also an influence on the English artist, explorer and colonist John White, with whom he collaborated.) In London in 1586 Le Moyne published a series of simple woodcuts of flora and fauna with the title Le clef des champs, pour trouver plusieurs animaux, tant bestes qu'oyseaux, avec plusieurs fleurs et fruitz, intended as a sort of model book for artists and dedicated to Lady Sidney. It was also around this time that Le Moyne drew the extraordinary gouache known as The Young Daughter of the Picts - a fantastical depiction of a woman whose body is entirely covered with beautifully painted flowers – which is today in the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven. Firmly established as a highly-regarded botanical artist, Le Moyne lived in the parish of Saint Anne's in Blackfriars until his death in 1588.

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Apart from the four florilegia albums known, other groups of drawings by Le Moyne include a set of fourteen miniatures of flower, fruit and insects, painted in gouache on vellum; eight of which are at the Dumbarton Oaks Library in Washington, D.C. and another six which were formerly in the Eric Korner collection and were sold at auction in New York in 1997. Another group of twenty-seven study sheets of flowers, fruit, birds and insects by Le Moyne, drawn in a more informal manner, was dispersed at auction in 2004; five of these reappeared at auction in New York in 2019.